



HISTORICAL FICTION: UNDERSTANDING PLACE AND THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE THERE

A Reading Unit of Study for Fifth Grade

By Marcie von Beck

Introduction

This is a five-week unit on historical fiction designed for a fifth-grade classroom in Seattle, Washington. Students spend the first four weeks reading three, or more likely, four appropriate-level historical fiction novels and discussing them in partnerships and clubs. The fifth week is spent reflecting and discussing the similarities and differences between the people, time periods, and places of all the books. The reading skills explicitly addressed in this unit are envisioning, empathizing, reading critically, and synthesizing, but because the unit is typically taught later in the year, there is an expectation that the students draw upon all the other skills they have learned throughout the year and in previous years as well. The work of this unit lifts the level of these other reading skills by providing students with the opportunity to apply and practice them in the context of this more complex genre. The new skills and strategies taught in the minilessons focus specifically on thinking deeply about the people and places of various historical time periods. Students direct their envisioning skills toward “seeing” the past and understanding the ways it affects the people who live within it. They study the characters and their roles within the stories to understand the motivations and consequences of the characters’ actions. The students also critically consider what power structures exist within the historical contexts and how these structures affect the stories that are told. Finally, they synthesize the thinking they’ve done by working together to create a tapestry of historical events and characters that tells a larger story of humanity, a story that they then compare to their own.

Marcie von Beck is a National Board Certified Teacher and instructional coach in Seattle, Washington. She loves historical fiction and believes it provides us with the perfect link between the past and present—a link created through stories. It is these stories, along with all the others we tell, read, and write, that help us understand ourselves and our world a little better. Marcie’s passion is helping students discover these stories and explore how they affect all of us.

RATIONALE FOR UNIT

Historical fiction offers students an incredible opportunity to engage with complicated texts as they explore history through fictional narratives. Compelled by narrative and familiar story structure, students are drawn into the beauty and significance of history and are able to learn about the people, places, and time periods that have existed before. They begin to understand and develop ideas about how place (geographical setting and time period) has a profound influence on the lives of the people who inhabit it. They work together to discover the complexities of human nature and learn that some of the problems and conflicts that have existed continue to exist, whereas others are more temporal and specific to certain circumstances.

Reading historical fiction also provides students with supplementary understanding about the particular time period. This is especially important as our students move further along in school and are confronted with history textbooks that are often above their reading levels or are written with less compelling craft. Giving students people to know and care about infuses the history with a magic they need to understand it more effectively. This helps support developing readers of nonfiction, and reluctant readers of fiction are fascinated by the embedded information in historical fiction and are willing to push themselves into texts that are more challenging and that ultimately raise their reading levels.

Historical fiction expects a lot from readers. While the personal story structures are often familiar to the students, they may be less familiar with the concurrent historical story threaded throughout that affects the characters and that may, in turn, be affected by them. Readers are constantly bombarded with new information about the people, places, and time period, information that will need to be considered and assimilated into the overall understanding of the story. It is important for the students to be able to access supplementary information regarding the time period and events that occurred. Students become powerful readers as they pause to think, research, write brief entries, or discuss with other students the stories they are grappling with. It is critical for the students to work together in partner and/or club discussions in order to get the most out of the unit. In addition to the minilessons that support the independent reading that feeds into these discussions, read-alouds modeling the use of these and other strategies are important. Accountable talk is a critical aspect of the read-aloud, as it is here that discussion skills are most effectively taught, skills soon to be practiced independently in partnerships and small groups. Because of the complexity inherent in historical fiction and the range of performance within every classroom, small-group strategy lessons are critical.

DECISIONS TO BE MADE

Students read three to four historical fiction novels throughout this unit, depending on their reading levels and choice of texts. They choose from a variety of books at their levels and often end up reading books that are set in different time periods in history. Obviously teachers may choose to determine the time period and to channel students to read within a single time period, but this takes a vast library and also limits the ability of the students to reflect across greater expanses of time, looking for patterns of human behavior. That said, there are also benefits to choosing the time period the students will read about, not the least of which are that the students develop a stronger content understanding of that particular time.

It is important that students are reading the same text with at least one other person. This partnership or club work supports their reading *and* content understanding, and also provides accountability and goal-setting support. Regardless of how you choose to structure your grouping, within the unit you will find specific strategies included to help students discuss and understand the texts they are reading. These are taught during read-aloud sessions and are aligned with the different parts of the unit.

READING SKILLS ADDRESSED IN THIS UNIT

Envisioning

- Students learn to pay close attention to the people and places within the historical context of their books in order to “see” the stories.
- Students revise and add to the images they have created as they read and as they gain more information.

Empathizing

- Students learn to consider the motivations behind the actions that different characters take.
- Students learn to examine the historical and personal conflicts that are central in a story from multiple perspectives in order to better understand the complications of the time period.
- Students learn to compare and contrast the events in their texts with events in their lives, considering how times have changed (or not) and how place affects people.

Reading Critically

- Students learn to consider issues of power and resistance within their stories, and do this with the books read within this unit.
- Students learn that readers often consider whose voice is heard and not heard within a story and, when reading historical fiction, readers sometimes think about what this says about the time period.
- Students learn to think critically about what the writer's intentions were as he or she wrote the text, including what the writer wanted the reader to know and understand about the people, time, and place.

Synthesizing

- Students learn to reflect on the context in which a story is set, including in this instance, a time of historical conflict. Readers sometimes reflect on similarities and differences between the story's setting and current day settings.
- Students learn that readers think about characters and the conflicts that shape their lives. In doing so, they consider many archetypes and reflect on similarities and differences between characters of then and of now.
- Readers learn to reflect on the relationships between people, time, and place in their books and compare them with those of today.

READ-ALOUDS AND ACCOUNTABLE TALK

In this unit, I use *Freedom Summer* and *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* for read-alouds, minilessons, and small-group strategy lessons.

Freedom Summer is a short, easily accessible picture book telling a story of resistance. *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* is a beautiful novel with incredibly rich characters and craft that I use to stretch all of my students. It is a story that mostly bears witness, which I can use to compare to the resistance in *Freedom Summer*, which leads to the deeper discussions necessary for teaching the critical reading strategies planned for the latter part of the unit.

Read-alouds and accountable talk are invaluable to this unit. Read-alouds are used, as always, to model fluent and engaged reading and also to model the new skills the students are acquiring. The main function of read-alouds in this unit, however, is to model and promote accountable talk among students so that they can be more powerful in their partner and group discussions. Strategies for developing and building on each other's ideas need to be explicitly taught, and using the common text in read-alouds is the perfect forum.

Each read-aloud session includes thinking and discussion prompts that promote and support the development of the particular reading skills taught during the current part of the unit.

PARTNER OR BOOK CLUB SUPPORT DURING READ-ALOUDS

Part One: *Partners help each other choose books that are a good fit and work together to get to know the historical context*

- Students work together to identify and build interest in various historical events or time periods. They do this by discussing possibilities and sharing existing content knowledge. They also discuss ways in which they will all grow as readers throughout the unit.

Part Two: *Partners help each other develop and promote empathy for multiple characters in a text.*

- Students grow their understanding of the characters in their books by considering their partner's perspective. They will attempt to take the perspective of their partner during discussion and try to support it with evidence from the text.

Part Three: *Partners help each other develop critical literacy.*

- Students work together to develop a big idea from the text and then push each other to go deeper by questioning and challenging each other's reasoning.

Part Four: *Partners help each other demonstrate their understanding, comparing and contrasting multiple texts on one theme, by one author, or addressing one era.*

- Students work together to generate big ideas across multiple texts, supporting their ideas with text, knowledge, or experience. They do this by considering the patterns and possible explanations they notice and develop across their reading and then offering and developing statements to "capture" them.

ASSESSMENT

Preassessment

- Before the start of the unit, students are asked to respond to a read-aloud picture book, *Coolies*, with the only prompt being, "Using everything you know about being a strong reader, what are you learning about the people and the place of this story?" Pausing four times throughout the text, the teacher, after each pause, prompts the students to write for two to three minutes. This writing is used to compare student performance with the same assessment, using a different short story, at the end of the unit, looking for evidence of growth. It will be very important to study the Post-its, looking for evidence of reading skills as well as how these skills might change throughout the story. Do the students begin with envisioning or prediction and move to synthesis or interpretation? If so, what qualities of

these skills are evident, and how will the instruction within the unit be adjusted to accommodate for the range of performance and ensure sufficient individual growth?

Notebook Entries (assessed once a week)

- Ideas and questions used in partner and group discussions are taught and modeled in read-alouds and minilessons.
- Reflective entries are based on the new or revised thinking from reading or discussions.

Conferring and Small-Group Work (teacher notes taken during conferences and small groups)

Independent Reading Logs (assessed once a week for volume)

Summative Assessment

- At the end of the unit, students are asked to respond to another read-aloud short story, *Baseball Saved Us*, with the same prompt as the preassessment: “Using everything you know about being a strong reader, what do you know about the people and the place of this story?” Pausing four times throughout the text, the teacher, after each pause, prompts the students to write for two to three minutes. This writing is used to compare student performance on the preassessment from the beginning of the unit, looking for evidence of growth.
- At the end of the unit, students are expected to choose three questions (from a total of five) and write a brief response. Teachers develop these questions by gathering the most effective thought-provoking issues or questions (as evidenced by discussions and from group feedback) that relate to the historical setting or the characters in the many books read by the students throughout the unit. The questions are taken from the students’ work with various texts but are transformed into more generally applicable prompts. The students will choose the questions and respond through the text(s) of their choice from those they read during the unit.
 - Below-grade-level responses include ideas but have little or no explanation or evidence to support them.
 - Grade-level responses include ideas, explanations, and accurate textual evidence to support each response.
 - Above-grade-level responses include grade-level requirements *and* comparison to other texts, including evidence from those texts.

RESOURCES

This unit is designed to accommodate the reading of historical fiction at any intermediate reading level. Students have a full range of choices regarding the historical periods their books are set in. Some students may be reading stories set during the civil rights movement of the mid-1900s, some may be reading about the arrival of European settlers, and still others may be reading about World War II. Consequently the skills taught are general enough to be applied to any historical fiction work. Each student, however, is expected to be reading his or her chosen book with at least one other student, and preferably in a group of three or four. This partner and/or club reading is critical in order to support the new historical information that students encounter and to promote the deeper thinking that occurs when students have the opportunity to discuss the same texts.

The details of the historical contexts and the personal challenges of each story will be different, but after reading at least two books, students will be supported and encouraged to look for larger universal themes that thread themselves throughout history.

Historical Fiction Novels

(For additional historical fiction titles with book levels, see the “Recommended Children’s Literature” book lists on the Resources CD-ROM.)

Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy, Gary D. Schmidt

Fever 1793, Laurie Halse Anderson

Stowaway, Karen Hesse

Elijah of Buxton, Christopher Paul Curtis

Nora Ryan’s Song, Patricia Reilly Giff

Fair Weather, Richard Peck

The King of Mulberry Street, Donna Jo Napoli

Weedflower, Cynthia Kadohata

Hattie Big Sky, Kirby Larson

Witness, Karen Hesse

The Trial, Jen Bryant

Al Capone Does My Shirts, Gennifer Choldenko

Bud, Not Buddy, Christopher Paul Curtis

A Long Way from Chicago, Richard Peck

A Year Down Yonder, Richard Peck

The Invention of Hugo Cabret, Brian Selznick

Don’t You Know There’s a War On? Avi

The Boy Who Dared, Susan Campbell Bartoletti

The Art of Keeping Cool, Janet Taylor Lisle

When My Name Was Keoko, Linda Sue Park
Number the Stars, Lois Lowry
Milkweed, Jerry Spinelli
The Devil's Arithmetic, Jane Yolen
The Book Thief, Marcus Zusak
The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963, Christopher Paul Curtis
Summer's End, Audrey Couloubis
The Wednesday Wars, Gary D. Schmidt
The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle, Avi
My Brother Sam Is Dead, James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier
Catherine, Called Birdy, Karen Cushman
Saturnalia, Paul Fleischman
Out of the Dust, Karen Hesse
Jason's Gold, Will Hobbs
The Gentleman Outlaw and Me, Mary Downing Hahn
Nightjohn, Gary Paulsen
Singing Hands, Delia Ray
The Game of Silence, Louise Erdrich
The Green Glass Sea, Ellen Klages
Yellow Star, Jennifer Rozines Roy

Picture Books

Freedom Summer, Deborah Wiles
Baseball Saved Us, Ken Mochizuki
The Babe & I, David A. Adler
The Bracelet, Yoshiko Uchida
Coolies, Yin
Train to Somewhere, Eve Bunting
A Sweet Smell of Roses, Angela Johnson
The Other Side, Jacqueline Woodson
A Taste of Colored Water, Matt Faulkner

Historically Related Nonfiction Texts

Historical fiction is a difficult genre. There are countless references to specifics related to time and place of which the reader may have no knowledge or understanding. It is impossible for a student to understand why something might be difficult for a character if he or she doesn't understand the larger historical context and its complications. For example, if students had no previous knowledge of the Japanese internment camps of World War II, they would

struggle to understand all of the nuances within a story such as *Baseball Saved Us* or *Thin Wood Walls*. If, however, students are encouraged to do some independent research on the event, including reading brief informational texts and studying the photos or sketches that accompany them, these same students can become more independent readers of historical fiction.

It is also extremely important that the content materials are multileveled so that all students can access necessary information. This is important not only to accommodate the students with various reading levels within the classroom but also to facilitate the different types of research necessary. Students often need quick, easy reference materials for the small gaps in their understanding, but they need more complete materials for larger gaps. Of course, decisions made at the beginning of the unit with respect to this unit's connection to a concurrent social studies or writing unit will also affect the variety of resources needed.

Overview of the Unit: Teaching Points

PART ONE:

Readers Need to Develop a Strong Sense of Place and the People Who Inhabit this Place As We Read Historical Fiction.

This first part of the unit is designed to be an easing into historical fiction. Students will be using reading skills they're familiar with but also learning slightly elevated versions of these skills that are particularly powerful as they work with this more difficult genre.

The students' energy around historical fiction is always high. Learning about other places and times is fascinating to students of all ages. In order for them to be as successful as possible and to build on the skills they have already learned, students need to realize that they will be using all of the skills they use for fiction as they begin this new unit. Setting aside a day or two to remind them of these skills and strategies will be well worth the effort.

One way to do this is to recycle any charts regarding fiction and the various strategies for each reading skill you've already worked on. A more interactive approach would be to have the students work together in small groups to re-create charts, using their journals to remind themselves of the particularly useful and prescient strategies. Once their interest is piqued and the classroom environment is established, you are ready to begin the explicit work of the unit.

- I. ▶ Readers envision the setting as we begin to read by paying close attention to landscape, buildings, interiors, technology, clothes, weather, and so on. We notice these things and jot them down or sketch them, thinking, “What do these things tell me about this place or these people?” (This session is written in full in the materials that follow.)
 - ▶ Mid-Workshop Teaching Point: Readers of historical fiction often come upon words or events that we are unfamiliar with. When this happens, we pause and try to make sense of what we are reading. If we encounter an unfamiliar word or phrase, we might try a fix-up strategy like using context clues and synonyms. If we encounter an unfamiliar event, we might take a few minutes to do some research, using the Internet or some non-narrative books available in the classroom.
- II. ▶ Readers identify the historical conflict or issues within our stories so that we can begin to understand the relationship between the time period and the characters involved. We do this by noticing clues in the book and then pausing to think about what we already know about the event or time period. Making a timeline of the major events is a great idea, and it can be revised and added to along the way.
- III. ▶ Readers think carefully about the personal strengths and challenges of the main character to better understand how the character is influenced by historical context. We do this by noticing how the character reacts to personal trouble or conflict, especially in relationships with other characters. Making quick notes about these reactions is a great way to record and track the interactions that influence the character.
 - ▶ Mid-Workshop Teaching Point: Readers often get to an exciting part of the story and just need to find out what’s going to happen! Strong readers often read quickly to find out but then go back and read more carefully so that we don’t miss any of the subtler clues that make the story even better.
- IV. ▶ Readers pay close attention to how the main character understands or deals with the historical conflict or issue within the story. We do this because historical fiction is highly dependent on the time and place, and it is critical to think about the relationship between this historical context and the characters. One way to do this is by creating multiple parallel timelines. Some readers find it helpful to track the historical events along with the personal events, or even the character’s emotional response to the events, and then to think about the relationships between the events.
- V. ▶ Readers are constantly adding to and revising our initial envisioning of the setting. As we read and gather more information or discuss ideas with our partner or group,

it's important that we check all this against what we already think or know and then use this new information to grow our understanding. Often a place's real nature is truly understood late in the text, so it is critical that readers stay open to subtle shifts and changes.

PART TWO

Readers Can Understand Historical Fiction Better by Thinking Critically About the Characters in Our Stories.

This next part raises the skill level by asking students to think more deeply about each of the characters and to consider how these characters are influenced by their historical contexts.

- VI. ▶ Readers often approach a narrative by considering the various character types that may exist within it. We do this by thinking about the characters and the roles they play in the story and considering other narratives we are familiar with that have similar characters. Making a list of the characters and noting these similarities is a great way to keep track of the characters and to also anticipate who is doing what and why. Who is the hero, the villain, the sidekick, the wise advisor, etc.? It is also important to keep in mind that these characters and the typical ways they act are not always consistent throughout the story—characters often change, and it is these changes and moments of change that are particularly interesting. (This session is included in the section that follows.)
- VII. ▶ Readers develop empathy for other characters in the story by trying to “see” the time and place through the characters’ eyes. We do this by pausing as we read to consider what a particular character (for example, the villain) sees in his or her “place.” We try to put ourselves in the shoes of these characters so that we can try to understand each character’s motivations and actions.
 - ▷ Mid-Workshop Teaching Point: Readers pay attention to the interactions between the main and secondary characters because these secondary characters often play key roles in the relationship between the historical context and the personal struggles. Readers can ask ourselves, “How do they help or challenge each other?” Paying attention to and making notes about these instances help readers to track important changes in the characters.
- VIII. ▶ Readers of historical fiction are constantly thinking about how the historical issues or events are influencing the characters in the story. “How are the characters reacting to the challenges they face? Would I act the same way? What about this time period makes this reaction appropriate or not?” Making a chart with the character’s

reactions, along with other possible reactions generated by the reader, often sheds light on the reasons for the reactions, and it is one way to better understand why a character does what he or she does.

- IX. ► Readers gather all our thinking about the people we've gotten to know in our reading and ask ourselves, "What do I know about these people so far? What do I know about these times and places?" Simply pausing to create a bulleted list of ideas can help deepen thinking and promote interesting discussion.

PART THREE:

Readers Benefit from Considering Which Characters Have Power and Which Don't—and, More Important, Why.

The third part assumes a strong basic skill level for thinking about setting and character. Students are now being challenged to think more broadly about the larger ramifications of power and voice in any story. This part is where they are expected to see the larger trends and patterns throughout history.

- X. ► Readers pay close attention to power structures in stories. We look for evidence that tells us who has power in this story, and why. Historical fiction provides us with great opportunities to think about inequities and the imbalance of power. We ask ourselves, "Why do certain characters have power and others don't? How is this related to the historical setting?" One way to keep track of the power structures within a story is by listing the characters in order of hierarchy, including brief notes about why they do or don't have power.
- XI. ► Readers identify from whose perspective the story is being told to better understand. We ask ourselves, "Who is telling this story? Which information is included and which is left out? Whose voice is heard and, just as importantly, not heard? Why?" It is often helpful for readers to consider times when we have felt powerful or not, heard or unheard, and what our emotional reaction was.
- XII. ► Readers often naturally empathize with the underdog. Historical fiction usually features characters (or groups) involved in some sort of resistance. Readers ask ourselves, "Who is resisting and why? What about the character or historical context is leading him to resist?"
- XIII. ► Readers often identify characters who simply bear witness. As we read, we are looking for clues that explain why the characters are so strong and are yet unable to overcome or have much of an effect on the challenges they face.

- XIV. ► Readers often consider what the text is expecting us to feel, understand, or know. As we read, we try to imagine what the writer was hoping we would understand about this time and place and about the characters who lived there. (This session is included in the section that follows.)

PART FOUR:

Readers Use Historical Fiction to Consider Time and Place and How Historical Context Relates to Us and Our World.

This last part of the unit gives the students an opportunity to consider the power of historical fiction as well as their own growth as readers and as critical students of history.

- XV. ► Readers consider the different historical contexts we have read about. We work together to generate a list of the historical conflicts or issues of each story we read, creating a broader view of time and place. We think about and discuss how these conflicts or issues are similar and different, about how they are related and why. Are voices that were unheard in these historical contexts the same voices that are heard now? Does it seem like people are learning from history, or do we keep repeating the same types of mistakes?
- XVI. ► Readers consider the personal conflicts in the stories we read, and we think about and discuss some of the universal characteristics of the heroes, villains, or other archetypes. We think about which of these characteristics we recognize in the people we know, asking ourselves, “Are we becoming a morally stronger people? What might be causing this?” (This session is included in the section that follows.)
- XVII. ► Readers consider the relationships between the historical and personal conflicts in the stories. We think about and discuss how certain elements and events in history can coincide with and influence personal struggles, and about how these historical and personal conflicts compare to those of today.
- XVIII. ► Readers think about all the new things we’ve learned within a unit of study and think about ways to carry these new skills along with us. We do this by reflecting on the goals we set for ourselves for the unit and the learning we achieved. We review our notebook entries and lesson notes to identify which ones were the most successful. We reflect with our partners on which discussions and goals were the most effective and why. And then we make plans for how to use this new learning in the next unit!



EXAMPLE MINILESSON

Part One, Session 1

CONNECTION

“Readers, whenever I am in a new place—a new city or new neighborhood, even a new friend’s house—I try really hard to pay attention to my surroundings. I look for cues to help me understand the place and the people who live there. I pay attention to what the buildings and rooms look like, what the people are wearing, how they are speaking. I do this so I can enjoy my visit and learn about this new place. Readers do the same thing when we are reading, especially if our stories are set in a place we’ve never been.”

Name your teaching point.

“Today I want to teach you that readers pay close attention to the setting as we read historical fiction. We do this to build a strong understanding of time and place, which is so important in this genre. One of the ways readers do this is by looking for clues that let us envision the time and place. We pay attention to the buildings and their interiors, the modes of transportation, the way people are dressed, and the way they talk and interact.”

TEACHING

“As I read from *Freedom Summer*, watch as I look for clues about this place and then make some quick notes about what I am envisioning.”

John Henry Waddell is my best friend.

His mama works for my mama.

Her name is Annie Mae.

Every morning at eight o’clock Annie Mae steps off the county bus and walks up the long hill to my house.

If it’s summer, John Henry is step-step-stepping-it right beside her.

“Wow! Just from this first page, I know so much about this story. I know it’s a story about two young boys, and I think, based on the people’s names, the setting must be down South. Also, the narrator says ‘mama,’ and that’s a word that I know some people from the South use. It also mentions that the narrator’s friend’s mama works for his mama and

that they get to his house on a county bus, so that makes me think that his friend might not have much money, but maybe *he* does since his mama can afford help. So I'm going to write on my Post-it 'Summer in the South/John Henry may be poor.' I can almost see the main character's house way up on the hill—I picture it being white, with columns and maybe a porch out front. I might sketch this out really quickly in my notebook. Maybe I'll add some more to this later on as I gather more clues or make some other notes if I can't draw what I'm thinking."

"I'm going to read a little more and see if I can find any other clues about this place."

We like to help Annie Mae. We shell butter beans. We sweep the front porch. We let the cats in, then chase the cats out of the house until Annie Mae says, "Shoo! Enough of you two! Go play!" We shoot marbles in the dirt until we're too hot to be alive. Then we yell, "Last one in is a rotten egg!" and run straight for Fiddler's Creek.

"So now that I've read a little farther, I'm pretty sure they live in the country. They help shell beans, which must mean they have a garden. They have lots of cats, and they play outside a lot. I can see in my mind the big white house on the hill, with grassy lawns all around and big trees. I can see the boys playing marbles in a flat spot off to the side of the house, near the garden. Also, they like to swim in a creek, which I know is like a small river. So I'm going to add a creek to my sketch and note 'Fiddler's Creek.' And the final thing I'm thinking about this place is that it seems like a happy place."

"Did you notice how I paid close attention to the details?" You could make a chart here, listing some of the generic details—don't forget to add to it. "I noticed the names of the characters, and I thought about the bus and what that might mean. I tried to make an image in my mind of what the place looked like. We've done some envisioning work already this year, so it's really important that we keep with us all that we know about doing that. But now we are going to apply it to books with a lot of historical clues that we'll need to pay attention to."

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

"So now I want you to try this. We've just started reading *Lizzy Bright and the Buckminster Boy*. So far, what do you see when you close your eyes and imagine Phippsburg? What kind of a place do you think this is? Turn and talk with your partner."

As children talk, listen in on their conversations, bringing to the whole group two or three key ideas that will get them started. "Mary mentioned that she thinks Phippsburg is a small town in Maine and that the story is set in the past. I heard Tim say that he

thinks the people of the town are religious because they are hiring a pastor and are welcoming him and his family with a big festival.”

“Okay, so I’ll read a little farther, and I want you to do what I did with *Freedom Summer*—listen closely for clues about this place—and then we’ll stop and add them to what we already know:”

With whistles and calls and impossible boasts, the men and boys of First Congregational strolled across to Thayer’s haymeadow—mown just the day before—and marked out the lines. They circled the pitcher’s mound, and squared the batter’s box beside the plate. Then Deacon Hurd, now Umpire Hurd, took off his jacket and held a bat out to Turner.

“You ever play this game before, young Buckminster?”

“Yes, sir,” said Turner.

He wanted to say, “About a hundred thousand times.” Or, “About a hundred million times.” Or, “Mister, I can shimmy a ball down a line so pretty, there isn’t a soul on God’s green earth that can even get near it.” But he held back and just grinned again.

“Then you’re the first man up,” said Deacon Hurd.

“Yes, sir,” said Turner, and took the bat, the resin on it feeling like home.

“I’ll stop here. In your notebooks, jot down some details or make a quick sketch of Phippsburg and what you know of it.” Give the students one or two minutes to do this.

“Now turn and share with your partner.”

Walk among the students, gathering new information to add to your notes/sketch, making sure to model quick sketching and notes so students see that it’s about efficiency, not art!

LINK

“Readers, I heard so many great ideas that we can add to our understanding of place in both of our stories. You are really starting to understand how important the time and place are in any story, and especially in historical fiction. You paid very close attention to the buildings, interiors, technology, people’s clothing and speech, and other things that are letting you envision the setting. As you go back to your reading spots, make sure you add this strategy to all the ones you already know that let readers begin to grow an understanding of the place where a story is set. You’ll have the last few minutes of class today to share with your partner or group the work you do while you read.”

CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

STRATEGY LESSON

This is a lesson to support readers who struggle to use the clues they find to build a stronger sense of the places in books. It is critical that early on in their books they develop a sense of the place and the differences between now and the time and place they are reading about.

“Readers, sometimes it’s helpful to look at photographs or sketches from the time period we are reading about. Doing this can help jump-start our envisioning as we read so that we’ll be more likely to notice the clues the writer gives us. So here are some photos that I have from the same time period as *Freedom Summer*. I’m going to show you how I look closely at the details in this picture so I can get a better sense of this place. I’m going to jot down some of the things I’m noticing. Then I’m going to read some more from *Freedom Summer* and look for some familiar clues—clues that I might have noticed in the photographs. I’ll jot those down, too.”

After modeling this work, ask your students to try it out with another photograph.

“Let’s take a look at another photograph. What do you notice about it that helps you envision this time and place? Write your ideas on a Post-it.” Look over students’ Post-its to see if they are noticing details that will help them. Steer them away from insignificant ones. “So now what else do you think about the setting in *Freedom Summer*?” Let students share some ideas. “Okay, great job. So one thing we can do if we’re struggling to envision the place of our story is to find some photographs or sketches from the same time period and study these closely. We can get those photos from books over on the table or from the computer, but first we have to have a general time period to look up. These pictures we just looked at are from the civil rights era—around the 1960s. Jot down the time period you’ll search for.”

Look over students’ Post-its and release kids as soon as they know what to look for and where.

STRATEGY LESSON

This lesson sets readers up to look for ways in which authors use setting to reveal something about the historical or personal conflict in a story.

“Writers often use more sophisticated craft to help their readers make more meaning. As we’re reading and developing a sense of place, another thing we can pay attention to is the contrast of settings. Writers often include multiple settings—like the country and the town in *Freedom Summer* or like the town and the island in *Lizzie Bright*. A writer might even use

color in his or her description of the places to give readers a sense of persona or mood. Listen for this as I read from *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*:

In fact, all the buildings up and down Parker Head Road were white, and though most looked as if they had seen more winter storms than any house should have to, they all stood with corners as straight and trim and proper as if they wore invisible corsets. All of them had green shutters and all of them had green doors—except for one, whose shutters were as yellow as sunlight and whose door was as red as strawberries.

“This description makes me wonder about the kinds of people who live here. All the houses are the same! And they’re all so neat and tidy, even though the weather is really rough in Maine. It makes me wonder if the people need their houses to be perfect in order to feel safe. I wonder what they are afraid of? But then there’s this one house that is different. It has bright yellow and red paint. I think the person who lives in this house must be different from the other people. I’m going to write a little in my notebook about the contrast between these houses and how I think that the person in this house is going to play an interesting role in the story. Notice how I use some of the exact words from the book—I want to capture the colors and the feelings I am getting from this. I’m also going to leave some space, though, because I know I’ll need to come back to this and add some more to my thinking.”

“Let me read a little more, and as I do, listen for some more clues. Remember, you can be listening for simple clues about the place, or about contrast, or about colors that the writer uses to give us a better sense of Turner’s world.” Read a little farther and then stop, asking the students to turn and talk; then have them share out some of their thoughts. “Okay, I’d like each of you to write a brief entry about this place, thinking about all the clues that helped you.”

Watch and coach the students as they do this.

“So, readers, always be on the lookout for the use of contrasting settings in a story and for color, too, if its mentioned. Writers often juxtapose places and color to reveal something to the reader about the mood of the story, about a personal or historical conflict that is brewing, or about the characters themselves.”

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT

"Readers, DeShawn just did some fantastic work. He's reading *Number the Stars*, and he came across something that didn't make sense to him. Instead of just going on, he stopped—that's so smart to do!—and went over to the table of historical nonfiction books I set out. He found a book with some information about World War II, he made a couple of notes for himself, and then he resumed his reading. Readers, historical fiction includes lots of information and vocabulary that is sometimes unfamiliar to readers. If we don't take the time to research the parts we don't understand, we won't get as much out of the book as we could. When this happens—when we get stuck on something in a historical fiction text—we have choices to make. If we encounter an unknown word, we could use the context clues around the unknown word like we've done in our other reading. We could also think of a synonym that would make sense and then read on with that word in mind to see if it fits. If we get stuck on an event or behavior that is confusing or that we don't know much about, we could stop and do a little bit of research. We could use the computer or reference one of the informational texts on the table, like DeShawn did. If neither of those things works, we could talk to our partner, who might be having the same trouble, and try to figure it out together."



TEACHING SHARE

"Readers, you have done such great work today! Take the last few minutes to work with your partner—we'll do this a lot in this unit. It's so important to jot down our ideas about place and build on these as we go. We can also help each other with this. Readers often notice different things, so we can help each other by sharing the work we did today and adding to it the ideas our partner has. It's essential that as we read on in a text, we keep adding to our sense of place—by sketching or making notes—and even revising if new information leads us to change our idea about something. Let's spend the next five minutes sharing so that we can add to and revise our drawings and notes about place."



EXAMPLE MINILESSON

Part Two, Session VI

CONNECTION

“Readers, I babysat my niece the other day; she’s six. We watched *The Lion King* together—again! She *loves* that movie! She knows all the words; she even gets up and dances with all the animals at the end! Of course she loves Simba. As I was watching, I was reminded how most movies and stories have the same types of characters in them. In *The Lion King*, Simba eventually becomes the hero and defeats Scar. In *Star Wars*, it’s Luke Skywalker vanquishing Darth Vader, and so on. There’s usually a good guy and a bad guy—as well as lots of other character types in a story.”

Name your teaching point.

“Today I want to teach you that, as readers, we can use this knowledge—that stories often contain the same types of characters—to help us understand the stories we are reading better. When we anticipate what characters might do or understand what they have done based on what roles they fall into, we read with a fuller understanding of how a story will unfold. These common character types or roles in stories are also referred to as archetypes.”

TEACHING

“Help me generate a list of characters we all know. It might be helpful to think of some of the read-alouds we’ve done this year, like *The Great Gilly Hopkins* or *Feather*, or a movie like *The Lion King* or *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, or even a fairytale like *Cinderella*. I’ll start the list with Gilly, Simba, and Harry Potter because these all seem like the good guys or the heroes we know as a class. What about other typical characters? Turn and talk with your partner about other types of characters and their roles in books.”

Make a chart listing several of the ideas shared, including the villain, victim, advisor, and sidekick.

“Now if we think about the stories we know, like *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, *The Lion King*, *Harry Potter*, or *Cinderella*, we know that all of these similar types of characters, or archetypes, are important to the story. Simba would have been just another lion on the Serengeti if it hadn’t been for Scar. And Harry Potter would have perished long ago without Ron and

Hermione to help him. And what about Cinderella? She wouldn't have made it to the ball without her fairy godmother. All of these characters play certain roles, as do many others we haven't even listed, and these roles are critical to the story. If we can think about various archetypes as we read, we can anticipate individual characters' roles and understand better why the characters act the way they do."

"I'm going to start a list of characters for *Lizzie Bright*. Hmm, I guess Turner is our hero, although so far he doesn't seem like much of one. But I know that usually the main character in a story is or becomes the hero—I know this from all the stories I've read—so I'm going to list him as our hero, with a question mark for now. Who else? I guess I would put Reverend Buckminster as an advisor. He's Turner's father, and he must be a wise man to be a minister. And then there's Deacon Hurd and his son, Willis. Remember how Willis and the other boys laughed at Turner when he tried to hit the baseball and then later when Turner was too afraid to jump off the cliff into the ocean? Willis seems pretty mean, so I'm going to list him as a villain—that's a bad guy. Willis reminds me of Bradley Chalkers in *There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom*. The scenes when they first meet are even a little similar."

"I'm going to write all of these names and archetypes on our list so I can see if they stay as I've described them."

"Listen as I read this next section, and think about characters we have or haven't listed. I'm going to be reading and looking for other characters that might be similar and about evidence to support my thinking. As I read, ask yourself, 'Is this person good, bad, indifferent? What do we think makes these characters important to the story? And do they remind us of any other characters from other stories? Remember, we left off right where Turner threw the stone, and it hit the picket fence of the "narrowest, sharpest, most peaked house on the street."

Mrs. Elia Hurd looked at Turner; her head a little to one side, her old eyes as pale as her shawl. Her lips parted, closed, parted again, and then she said what he had never expected anyone else in the wide world to say: "So, Turner Buckminster III," she asked, "When you look through the number at the end of your name, does it seem like you're looking through prison bars?"

Turner fell back one step.

She came closer and laid her hand against his cheek. He did not move. "Sometimes," said Turner softly, "I just want to light out. . ."

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Hurd, her hand still on his cheek, "I do, too. Just light out for the Territories." And suddenly, Turner thought he could smell sweet grass.

- *Of course you will probably be using a different read-aloud, or at the very least be at a different point in the book, and this is fine. The important thing is to find a section in your reading that illustrates the teaching point. I also try to take advantage of the minilesson time to think aloud about critical parts in the story. This part is the first time Turner feels there may be someone else in the world who understands him.*

“Wow! This is such an interesting interaction! I like Mrs. Hurd—remember, she lives in the house with the yellow shutters and red door. She’s not afraid to be different. I think that is how she is going to be important to the story. Maybe she is another advisor. Maybe she will help Turner deal with all this pressure he is feeling. I’m going to write her down on our chart and include this part of my thinking about her not being afraid to be different.”

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

“I’m going to read a little more, and I want you to try what I just did. As I read, think about the different characters or archetypes, and when we come upon another character, try to determine what role you think he or she might play. Remember, it’s okay if you’re not sure. Often the characters seem to start out one way, but as we learn more about them through their actions, we realize that they are not what they first seemed. Be on the alert for that, too.”

Read the next two to three pages of the text and then pause. “Okay, readers, take a minute to think about what I just read. Think about what role in the story you think this character might play. Why do you think this? What evidence do you have?” Give the students a minute to think, and then have them turn and talk with their partner. Listen in on their conversations, and share out some of their ideas.

LINK

“Readers, today we’ve done some great work around archetypes, around the different roles that characters typically play in stories. As you go back to your reading spot, take a minute to make a list of the characters in your story. Use the chart we created to help you think about what archetypes they represent or who else they remind you of. Who is the hero? Who is the villain? Are there any sidekicks? Advisors? And remember, these are just notes representing your current thinking based on the evidence you have so far. Make sure that as you read and meet new characters, as well as learn more about the ones you already know, you keep your mind open to change. As you read, keep adding to your character chart, and don’t forget to include evidence so that if you start to question your original thinking, you’ll know where it came from.”

CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

STRATEGY LESSON

This strategy lesson aims to support students who are struggling to clue in on the evidence that indicates what archetype, each character is.

“Readers, sometimes it’s hard to know what information is important when we’re thinking deeply about characters. One thing we can do is pause and ask ourselves, ‘Do I like this character?’ and then follow up with, ‘What is it about this character that I like or don’t like?’ But remember, it’s critical that we look at the text and find the evidence, the words that the writer used to make us feel that way. So watch as I do this with *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*. Remember that we’re reading about Lizzie and the small crab that grabbed her toe.”

She looked out at the thrusting tide, clenched her toes into the loose sand, and smelled the salty, piney air. At thirteen, she was, as her grandfather liked to remind her, one year older than the century, and so a good deal wiser. Too wise to stay on Malaga Island, he said, but she planned to stay there forever. Where else, after all, did the tide set a pale crab on your toe?

“Readers, to me, this one paragraph says so much about Lizzie. First of all, I really like her. I like that she’s not afraid of the crab, even though it’s tugging on her toe! You see how I’m finding evidence in the text to support my liking her? Also, it says that her grandfather thinks she is very wise, but even so, she loves her home so much that she is content to stay there forever. And it seems like what makes her so happy is the setting of her home—the smell of the ocean air, the feel of the sand on her foot, even that clinging crab. This makes me think that she is very appreciative of nature and of little details, which is another thing I like about her.”

“I’d like you to open your books up to the place you stopped reading. Look back over the last couple of pages and try to find some information about a character. Place your finger on that part when you find it.” Wait for a minute as they all do this, helping as necessary. “Okay, readers, now try what I just did. Read a couple of paragraphs, asking yourself whether you like or dislike the character and why. What is it in the text that makes you feel this way? When you’ve read and thought about it, write your ideas down in your notebook.”

Support students as they do this, asking them to show you the text and to write it just as it is in the book.

“Readers, thinking deeply about the characters in our stories is so important. If we’re reading and we can’t get a good sense of them—what kind of people they are—one thing we can do is try this strategy: we can ask ourselves whether we like or dislike the character and what specifically makes us feel that way. And we can name, as precisely as possible, what in the text is triggering that reaction.”

STRATEGY LESSON

This strategy will help challenge your readers who are ready to begin noticing the complications in characters, the contradictions in their actions.

“Readers, often when we’re reading and thinking deeply about characters, we come across information about them that doesn’t seem to fit. We think we know the character, but then he or she does something that seems totally out of character! When this happens, it’s really important to stop and think about why the writer included this moment. It must be important; otherwise the author would have written it differently. One thing we can do when this happens is to try to think about why the character would act this way. I try to put myself in his or her shoes, thinking about my life and all the issues I’m dealing with. Watch as I do this with *Freedom Summer*. This part that I once struggled to understand comes early on in the story.”

I have two nickels for ice pops, so we put on our clothes and walk to town.

John Henry doesn't come with me through the front door of Mr. Mason's General Store.

He's not allowed.

“How you doin', Young Joe?” asks Mr. Mason. He winks and says, “You gonna eat these all by yourself?”

My heart does a quick-beat.

“I got one for a friend,” I say, and scoot out the door.

“Yessir, it's mighty hot out there!” Mr. Mason calls after me.

“I love ice pops,” says John Henry.

“Me, too,” I say.

“When I read this, I was surprised. I really liked Joe, and he seemed like such a good friend to John Henry. I expected him to stand up for his friend. If John Henry couldn't go into the store, maybe Joe should have refused, too, I thought. But then I put myself in Joe's shoes and imagined the time period he lived in and the issues that he was dealing with. Joe and John Henry were living in the South during a very tumultuous time. Civil rights were the main issue, and lots of changes were taking place. Some people agreed with these changes and others didn't. I think as a young boy, it would have been very confusing. Joe probably hated that John Henry wasn't allowed in the store, but he was probably used to it and too afraid to do anything about it. I decided that since this event— Joe being afraid to stand up for John Henry—happens early in the story, maybe it has something to do with how Joe changes by the end of the story. I made the choice to be on the lookout for more signs of Joe gaining courage or having more opportunities to stand up for his friend.

“Readers, do you see how I stopped and thought about this confusing part in the story, how I stepped into Joe’s shoes and tried to imagine what he was feeling, and how the time period may have affected his action? That made me think about how Joe might change throughout the story. Now I want you to try it. Turn to a part in your book where one of the characters is doing something that is unexpected.”

Wait for them; this may take a while.

“Now try to state what it is exactly that seems strange to you, like when I expected Joe to stand up for John Henry and not go into the store without him. Okay, now put yourself into that character’s shoes and think about what he or she may be dealing with.”

Give students a few minutes to read and think, and then have them share their thoughts with the others.

“Readers, remember, it can help to pause in our reading when we get to a point where we’re confused about a character’s behavior or actions. These parts of the story are red flags for us. When we encounter a red flag, it can help to stop and think about what it might mean. One way to do that is to put ourselves into the character’s shoes.”

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT

“Readers, I was listening in on a conversation that Tara and Beth were having, and I wanted to share with you what they were talking about—it was so smart! They were struggling to identify their main character as the hero of the story. They thought that he probably would become the hero, but there wasn’t much evidence to support that idea. I mentioned to them the idea of a ‘reluctant hero,’ and we unpacked what that might mean. Readers, a reluctant hero is a character who finds herself in a situation in which she needs to rise to the occasion. Something happens that makes her act in a way that is surprising, as if she didn’t know she had a strength or courage—or something—within herself. In this way, the hero is reluctant—the challenge she faces seems overwhelming. But one way or another, the character meets the challenge, usually with the help of a sidekick, and thus becomes the hero of the story. So if you are like Tara and Beth and have a feeling that a character is the hero but you’re not sure, you could actually label that character as a ‘reluctant hero’ and then read very closely for evidence that supports this new thinking.”



TEACHING SHARE

“Readers, you’ve done such great work today! I was walking around noticing your archetype notes, and they’re so interesting. So many of you were struggling to commit your characters to an archetype, and this is understandable. As strong readers, we know that most characters, especially the main ones, change. But to really understand and think deeply about these changes, it’s often helpful to establish a strong sense of who these characters are in the beginning, which is what we did today. For the last five minutes of class, share with your partner or group the character or characters you think are likely to change the most.”



EXAMPLE MINILESSON

Part Three, Session XIV

CONNECTION

“Readers, last night as I was preparing for today’s classes, I was doing my regular thinking about what I want our work to accomplish. I asked myself, ‘What do I want the kids to know or understand by the end of the day?’ This made me think about the reading work we are doing. Writers always have an image or a purpose in mind as we write our stories. We want our readers to feel, understand, and know more after they are done reading our book.”

Name your teaching point.

“Today I want to teach you that as a reader, it is often very helpful to try to anticipate or imagine what we think the writer is trying to accomplish. What is it that he or she is hoping we will understand about this time and place and about the characters who lived there? What is interesting is that two writers can write the same story, but depending on the information they include and how they develop their characters and setting, the stories can be very different. If readers try to think like writers—specifically, like the writer of our story—we come to a richer understanding of that particular story. We can do this by keeping track of this thinking as we accumulate more information about the place or the characters; as we build this information, we understand both much better.”

TEACHING

“Readers, watch how I do this with *Freedom Summer*. I’m going to try to imagine what the writer was intending me to feel, know, or understand as I read. I’m thinking about Joe and John Henry and about their friendship, about how much fun they have together. Early on in the story, the writer describes the fun they have swimming at Fiddler’s Creek. So I’m going to make some notes about this; I’m going to make a two-column chart in my notebook. On the left side, I’m going to write, ‘Things I Know’; on the right side, I’ll write, ‘What the Writer Is Trying to Do.’ The first thing I’m going to write is on the left—Joe and John Henry love to swim in Fiddler’s Creek. On the right, I’m going to write what I think this does to help the story—John Henry can’t swim in the town pool, but because they are such good friends, they swim in the creek, where no one is making any

rules. So I'll write, 'There are rules, but the boys go around them.' I'm going to read another part of the book and then add to my notes:"

"I'm gonna swim in the town pool!" he hollers. "Is it deep?"

"REAL deep," I tell him. "And the water's so clear, you can jump to the bottom and open your eyes and still see."

"Let's be the first ones there," says John Henry.

"I'll bring my good-luck nickel, and we can dive for it."

"When I read this, I am filled with all the hope of change that John Henry and Joe must be feeling. John Henry is so excited about swimming in the town pool! The boys talk about it being deep (John Henry is such a good swimmer), and Joe explains how the water is so clear—I think the writer is using this to contrast it to the creek, which is probably not very clear—so the author wants us to know that the boys expect it to be even better. So I'm going to make a note on the left: 'Town pool water is deep and clear.' On the right, I'll write, 'Town pool is better.' This is what I think the writer wants me to think. I wonder if there is anything else the writer is hoping we'd understand from just this one part of the book."

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

"Readers, turn and talk about this. What else could we add to our notes?"

Listen in on the conversations.

"Wow! I heard some great ideas. I heard Theo and Annie talking about how John Henry wants them to be the first ones there. They think the writer wants us to know how hopeful he is but also how brave he wants to be. I'm going to add that to our chart: 'Wants to be first in the pool/hopeful and brave.' Tina was saying that the part about John Henry wanting to know whether the pool is deep meant that he didn't know, that he'd never been to the town pool. That's important if we think about how much of a change this is. The writer wants us to know that this is a big deal, that overnight the rules are changing. Let's add this to our chart, too."

LINK

"So, readers, as you go back to your reading today, think about all the work we did here in just a few short minutes. We only read a paragraph, but we got so much out of it. I feel like we're really starting to understand what the writer is hoping we feel right now. He

wants us to feel this huge sense of hope that the boys are feeling. If you feel like these notes would be helpful for you, try this work today. Try to consider what the writer is hoping we feel, know, or understand about the people or place of our stories. If we do this work along the way, we can be so much more powerful in our reading.”

TEACHING SHARE

“Readers, we are about finished with our reading of historical fiction. As we take these last few days to look over and discuss all the great reading and thinking we’ve been doing, some of you will need to finish this last book. Some of you are farther along and are about done reading. So for the last few minutes today, we need to talk with our partner or group and make a reading plan that allows all of us to have our reading and notes completed within the next two days. If you have quite a bit to read, you’ll need to set some more aggressive volume goals. Think about where you could fit a little extra reading into your daily schedule. If you are finished with your last book, or about to be, you’ll need to consider what type of reading work you can be doing for these two days. You might choose your favorite book from the ones you just finished and do some rereading. You could look back over your notebook and select a strategy that you could apply to this rereading. You could also do some reflecting on any of the books you have read.”